

## Bristol SU Student Engagement

Learn Act Engage Create: a four-step approach to embedding sustainability into the student experience

### About the project

#### Summary

Learn Act Engage Create is the journey through which students are guided during their time at University of Bristol to equip them with the skills and knowledge necessary to be responsible global citizens during their time at university and beyond.

Bristol SU's NUS Student Green Fund project, Get Green, developed the four-step model of student engagement for sustainability which has been critical in its success and is now being championed by senior managers at the University of Bristol.

The approach provided a coherent method to support and develop a strong cohort of change makers who have been engaging their peers in sustainability and creating change through their own ideas and campaigns.

#### Project partners

Get Green is one of twenty-five NUS Students' Green Fund projects. Bristol SU received £176,000 of funding to deliver sustainability engagement projects between September 2013 – August 2015. The University of Bristol Sustainability team provided 20% match funding for the project.

### The results

#### The problem

The Bristol SU Get Green project was funded by the NUS Students' Green Fund in September 2013 to create a step change in sustainability at the University of Bristol.

[Bristol SU Get Green](#)'s primary aim was to engage and empower students to create positive sustainable change whilst they are at University and after they graduate. We aimed to:

- Enable more students to participate in sustainability actions within their accommodation, especially focusing on energy and waste, and so instilling good habits at key points of transition.
- Build the capacity of the Students' Union to inspire and implement good sustainability practice amongst its membership and constituent organisations, in partnership, where appropriate, with sponsors and other stakeholders.



**BRISTOL SU**  
the best student life

#### Profile

- HE
- c. 12,000 undergraduate
- c. 5,000 postgraduate
- 16771 full-time
- 2351 part-time
- Circ. 50 staff
- Urban setting

#### Category supported by



**Scottish Funding Council**  
Promoting further and higher education

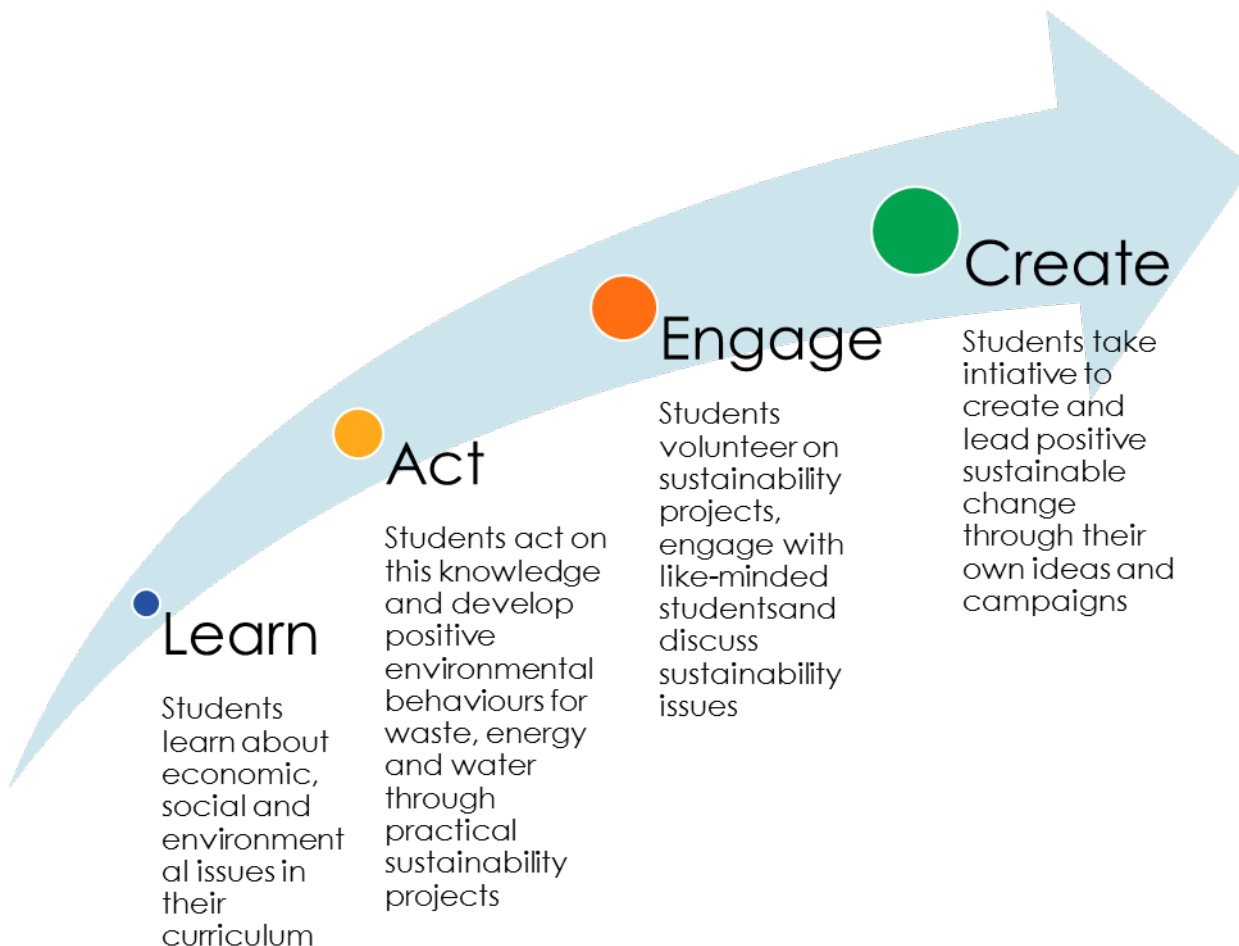
# Finalist's case study

- Equip students to become better citizens beyond their time at university, and to be better, more participatory neighbours within the wider community while students.
- Provide a holistic approach to sustainability by also developing initiatives around ESD.

## The approach

The team developed a four step approach to embedding sustainability into the University of Bristol student experience:

1. Students **learn** about sustainability through Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in their curriculum
2. They **act** on their knowledge by participating in energy saving or recycling projects in halls and on campus
3. They **engage** with other students and discuss issues around sustainability through volunteering and attending a monthly sustainability network
4. They take the initiative to **create** and lead sustainable change



The four step approach gave Bristol SU a coherent way of talking about the project and increased the team's efficiency, leading us to achieve 500% over the year 2 student engagement targets. In 2014/15, Get Green engaged over 10,000 University of Bristol students in sustainability issues.

The most important lesson we have learnt is the value of peer-to-peer, face-to-face engagement. Students talking to and engaging other students in sustainability has a much greater impact than a lecturer or staff member telling students they must do something. Our ambition is to create a shift in social norms and to achieve this we need to maximise peer-to-peer engagement going forward.

In order to mobilise such a cohort of students we aim to make sustainability relevant to each student by embedding social, economic and environmental sustainability issues in their curriculum. The LEARN strand of the Get Green project played a critical role in strengthening partnership work between Bristol SU, University of Bristol and the Cabot Institute (UoB's centre for multi-disciplinary research) to create a united approach to embedding sustainability in the curriculum.

Get Green aimed to increase student-led, peer-to-peer engagement for ESD curriculum change. A team of students interested in ESD work formed the Green Curriculum Team which increased awareness of Bristol's sustainability open unit and organised the inaugural 'A Students' Guide to Sustainability' conference which showcased undergraduate and postgraduate sustainability-related research and attracted 60 attendees from a variety of backgrounds. Speakers included a second-year medical student who presented her research on prescribing nature for health. This student-led approach powerfully demonstrated to senior members of the University that students want to learn about sustainability in their curriculum.

As students began to see social, economic and environmental sustainability as relevant to them, Get Green gave them opportunities to reduce their impact through simple, prescriptive steps as part of our ACT strand.

A team of twelve student staff knocked on every door in halls of residence speaking to over 2000 students about energy and waste saving and promoting the Student Switch Off competition. First year students were encouraged to engage in a few simple steps to save energy and increase recycling in order to win the competition. In 2014/15, the winning hall reduced their energy consumption by 17.5% and average recycling rates in all halls increased from 55% to 65%.

Students were able to reduce their impact in private accommodation by donating unwanted reusable items to the Bristol Big Give campaign at the end of the year. As students moved out of their accommodation for the summer they diverted over 80 tonnes of unwanted items, generating up to £200,000 for local and national charities. The 2015 campaign has diverted 25 tonnes from landfill in the first four weeks of the campaign.

A team of students interested in promoting shopping second-hand delivered three Love Bristol Fairs with the support of Get Green in 2014/15. Local charity shops were invited into the SU for a pop-up second hand market which attracted 1000 attendees across three events and raised over £4000 for local charity.

The Get Green project maximises peer-to-peer sustainability engagement through our ENGAGE strand. Twenty student volunteers led their own projects with the support of the team, including the Fossil Free Bristol Uni campaign, community garden action days and the launch of a student bike loan scheme.

Over 285 students attended six Engage Cafes through the year to discuss social, economic and environmental issues with their peers, including divestment, Fairtrade and future cities. Each Engage Café was led by a different individual or group of students.

As students get together and begin to develop ideas at meetings and the Engage Café they can apply for funding from our Create fund (£7000 of funding for student-led projects). The CREATE strand itself developed

50 student leaders who reached almost 2000 students with their social, economic and environmental sustainability projects and campaigns.

The four-step approach Get Green developed gave the project and sustainability significant grounding at the University and led to senior UoB staff championing our work at a high level.

Chris Willmore, Academic Director of Undergraduate Education said, "The SGF project has moved student union activity to a new level, raising the level and profile of student action and also transformed the union. The achievements of our students through SGF support are now one of big stories university leaders tell. It has been instrumental in revolutionizing understanding of what our students can achieve."

Bristol SU and the University of Bristol are looking forward to continuing to work together to create a culture of sustainability amongst our students.

## Performance and results

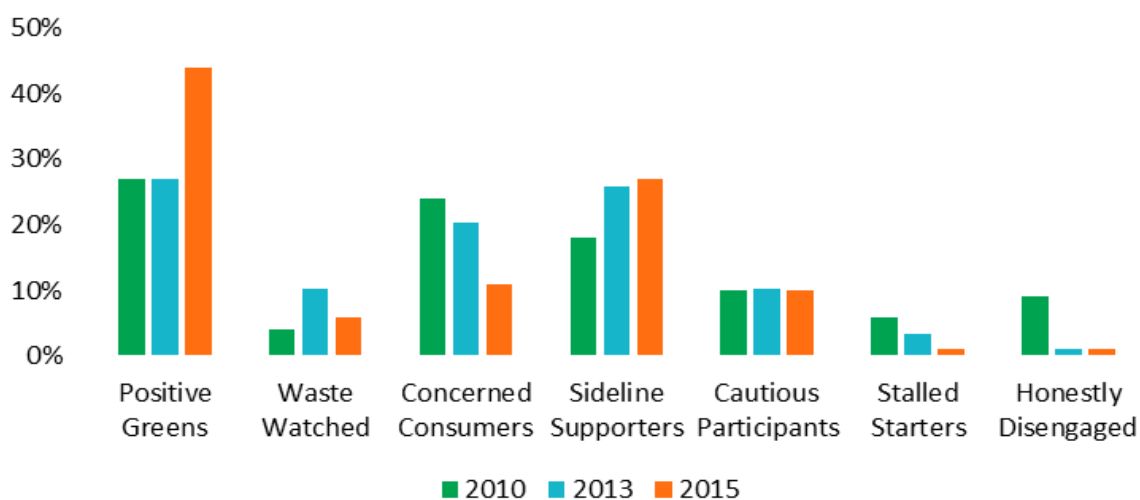
Get Green has provided students with the opportunity to meet like-minded students, learn new skills and participate in sustainable action across campus. The project has been successful in engaging hard-to-reach groups that the SU has traditionally struggled with (e.g. international and postgraduate students).

The project has created a cohort of graduates equipped with the skills and knowledge to make their future lives, communities and workplaces more sustainable:

- 17% increase in recycling in halls (from 48% in 2012/13 to 65% in 2014/15)
- 10% energy saving in halls between 2012/13 – 2014/15
- Over 80 tonnes of reusable items diverted from landfill in year 1 and 70 tonnes in year 2
- Over 10,000 students engaged in sustainability in 2014/15
- Over 200 University of Bristol and Bristol SU staff engaged in sustainability since 2013.
- 41% of students involved in Get Green were postgraduate.

The DEFRA segmentation surveys conducted in 2010, 2013 and 2015 demonstrate a significant step change in student understanding, attitude and behaviours towards sustainability which can be attributed to the four-step approach. The percentage of students identifying as 'Positive Greens' rose from 27% in 2013 to 44% in 2015, whilst the numbers of 'Honestly Disengaged' fell from 9% to 1%. This shows that sustainability is increasingly engrained in students' values and beliefs beyond University.

## DEFRA Segmentation Survey of University of Bristol Students



This model is a useful tool for other SUs and University's to use and adapt to engage students in a coherent and transparent way.

## The future

### Lessons learned

The most valuable lesson we learnt was the value of peer-to-peer, face-to-face engagement. Students talking to and engaging other students in sustainability has a much greater impact than a lecturer or staff member telling students they must do something. If our ambition is to create a shift in social norms, we need to maximise peer-to-peer engagement going forward

## Sharing your project

We have produced and circulated reports on all projects within the SGF programme around SU networks and they are available from the NUS and EAUC Sustainability Exchange. We frequently communicate with other SUs and institutions to share best practice.

As part of the project dissemination we have presented the strategy to Sustainability Managers of Russell Group Universities and delivered workshops on the four-step approach at the National Sustainable Schools Alliance Conference (to secondary/FE teachers and students) and the Learning from the Sharp-End ESD Conference. Chris Willmore, Academic Director for Undergraduate Education, has been a fantastic champion of our work and has included the four-step approach in presentations at conferences including at the 8th World Environmental Education Congress in Gothenberg in July and the 4th European Fair on ESD in Hamburg.

We submitted case studies for the Green Capital Bristol Method series to be shared with local, national and international organisations across all sectors.

## What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

### **Sam Budd, Chief Executive Bristol SU**

Our Students' Green Fund project has been a phenomenal opportunity to engage with students about important issues around sustainability. It has raised the profile of sustainability amongst staff and students at Bristol SU and the University. Sustainability is a key value of Bristol SU and gaining Green Gown recognition for our Get Green project would be a significant achievement for our students and staff.

## Further information

- [www.facebook.com/BristolSUGetGreen](http://www.facebook.com/BristolSUGetGreen)
- [www.bristolsu.org.uk/getgreen](http://www.bristolsu.org.uk/getgreen)